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WILLIAM MORRIS
AN ADDRESS DELIVERED THE XITH NOVEMBER MDCCCC AT KELMSCOTT HOUSE HAMMERSMITH BEFORE THE HAMMERSMITH SOCIALIST SOCIETY

BY J. W. MACKAIL

HAMMERSMITH PUBLISHING SOCIETY
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MDCCCCII

TWENTY-ONE YEARS AGO in this room, then filled with looms, William Morris began the manufacture of his famous Hammersmith carpets. For many years thereafter it was in regular use for Socialist meetings, and chiefly if not exclusively at last for those of the Hammersmith Socialist Society. This Society, the last of those founded or joined by Morris, represents in a sense the success and failure of his life. It certainly represents the subject which in those later years engrossed his mind and lay nearest to his heart. When, therefore, Mrs. Cobden-Sanderson, one of the friends for whom Morris had a very special affection, asked me to open, in this historic room, this winter's course of meetings of the Hammersmith Socialist Society—the first after long disuse—with an address on the founder of the Society, and the former master of the house, the invitation was one which I could not well decline on the ground I have given elsewhere, that what I have to say about Morris I have already said in the published record of his life.

I do not propose, however, now to go beyond or vary from that record, or to diverge into general criticism. What we think of great men matters very much to ourselves individually. It matters little to others; and least of all to

the great men themselves, who were not much affected by criticism when they lived, & whose influence upon the world is hardly touched by the criticism, even though that be fairer in its judgment and larger in its view, which follows them after death. For this reason I will not attempt to give any general estimate of Morris, whether as a poet, craftsman, and designer, or as a manufacturer and employer of labour, or as a Socialist and revolutionary. I would rather set forth, as briefly & clearly as possible, the actual facts of his life; and when I have done so, add a few reflections on the central lesson for Socialists of the present day which I conceive these facts to involve.

WILLIAM MORRIS, the eldest son of William Morris, a partner in the firm of Sanderson and Company, bill-brokers in the City of London, was born at Elm House, Walthamstow, his father's suburban residence, on the 24th of March 1834. In 1840 his father, who was by that time a man of considerable wealth, removed to Woodford Hall, a large house now known as Mrs. Gladstone's Convalescent Home, the park of which was only divided by a fence from Epping Forest. There throughout his boyhood he had the free range of that romantic tract of

country, one of the few remains of mediaeval, or perhaps even of prehistoric England. He was not notably precocious as a child, except that he learned to read, and was fond of reading, at a very early age. From the small private school in the neighbourhood where he received his earlier education he went to Marlborough College for four years; and then, after a year's interval of private study, to Exeter College, Oxford, where he went into residence in January 1853.

When he went up to Oxford in his nineteenth year, Morris had already developed the strong lines of his character. The subtle admixture of blood, of which science can give no full account, had made him a born lover of the Middle Ages, and a born hater of the ages which followed them. In the boy who refused to go to London to see the Duke of Wellington's funeral in St. Paul's, and spent the day in a solitary ride through the Forest to the remains of Waltham Abbey, the Morris of later years may be clearly seen. This reaction from modern tastes was reinforced by the strong wave of the Anglo-Catholic religious revival. That wave had but lately spread over England, and on families brought up, like his, in a narrow Evangelical tradition, it acted as a powerful stimu-

lating force. On its archaeological side, this influence led him towards the study of Gothic art. At Marlborough, with the aid of the school library and all the specimens of ancient building within reach, he had made himself a good antiquarian, knowing, as he said himself afterwards, most of what was to be known about English Gothic. Already as a boy he had acquired a large and minute knowledge of trees, flowers, and birds. The school system at Marlborough then left a boy free to use a great deal of his time as he liked. Close to it is the great forest of Savernake; all around it are the Wiltshire downs; and these surroundings were in complete harmony with his growing sense of romance and love of beauty.

At Oxford Morris at once formed the great friendship of his life, that with Edward Burne-Jones. From the very different upbringing of middle-class life in a large manufacturing town, Burne-Jones brought to Oxford an enthusiasm, a knowledge, and a lofty idealism, at all points in sympathy with those of Morris himself. Until death separated them, the two thenceforth lived in the closest intimacy, not only of daily intercourse, but of thought and work. Morris read only for a pass degree at College, & mixed little in the general life of his fellow-under-

graduates beyond the circle of a few intimate friends. But he was an incessant, swift and omnivorous reader, and his prodigious memory enabled him in these few years to lay up a vast store of knowledge. Religious perplexities, under which he was at one time on the point of joining the Roman communion, came & passed over. Ecclesiastical history and Anglican theology were in turn mastered and put aside. Their influence was replaced by an artistic and social enthusiasm, largely nurtured on the study of Carlyle and Ruskin. He had serious thoughts, when he came of age, of devoting the whole of his fortune to the foundation of a monastery, in which he and his friends might live a communal ascetic life devoted to the production of religious art. This ideal became gradually enlarged & secularised, but remained, in one form or another, his ideal throughout life.

During a tour in Northern France with Burne-Jones, in the autumn of 1855, Morris took the decision which directed the whole of his later career. He had gone to Oxford an ardent Anglican, with the intention of taking orders. But the Church, whether Anglican or Roman, had already become a fold too narrow for him. For the rest of his life, his own words of a later period, "In religion I am a pagan," were sub-

stantially true. Art now seemed to him to be the highest function of life, & architecture the highest and largest form of art. He made up his mind therefore to be an architect; broke the news with unusual reluctance and delicacy to his dismayed family; & as soon as he had passed his final examinations at Oxford that winter, became an articled pupil in the office of Street, one of the leading architects of the revived English Gothic.

This course of life was arrested within the year by a new and unforeseen influence, that of Rossetti. When Morris followed Street to London, where Burne-Jones had already begun his lifelong work as a painter, the two young men lived in Rossetti's daily intimacy. Rossetti's theory of life then was that all men ought to be painters except that large and useful class whose function it was to buy the painters' pictures. His powers of persuasion were unequalled over every one on whom he chose to exert them, and he made an easy conquest of Morris. At the end of 1857 Morris left Street's office, and began to paint in a studio which he shared with Burne-Jones in Red Lion Square, Holborn.

Before this, he had already made trial of his powers in imaginative literature. The faculty of story-telling he had possessed even as a schoolboy; and at Oxford he had found that story-

writing came to him just as easily. About the same time he had begun to write lyrical poetry, in which from the very first he showed originality and power rare in any beginner, and not excelled by the earliest work of any English poet. The lyrics and prose romances which he contributed, during 1856, to the Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, are the most remarkable among the contents of that remarkable volume. He went on writing poetry when he became a painter. In March 1858, he published a volume, The Defence of Guenevere and other Poems, which, without having a large circulation or a wide fame, had a profound effect on its limited audience and through them on English poetry itself. But poetry was then, as in a way it always afterwards continued to be, only his relaxation. His regular work was drawing, painting in oil and water colour, modelling, illuminating, and designing. For several months in the autumn and winter of 1857 he was working with a company of friends on the celebrated tempera decorations of the Union Society's debating hall at Oxford. While engaged on this work he first met the lady whom he married in April 1859.

For several years after his marriage Morris was absorbed in two intimately connected oc-

cupations: the building & decoration of a house of his own, and the foundation of an association of decorators who were also artists, with the view of reinstating decoration, down to the smallest details, as one of the fine arts. Red House, Upton, which is still extant with a good deal of its original decoration, though in greatly changed surroundings, was the first serious attempt made in this country in the present age to apply art throughout to the practical objects of common life. Its requirements, and the problems it raised, had a large share in leading to the formation, in 1861, of the firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Company, manufacturers and decorators, and to the whole of Morris's subsequent professional life. The decoration of churches was one side of the business. On its larger secular side it gradually was extended until, besides painted windows and mural decoration, it included furniture, metal & glass wares, painted tiles, cloth and paper wall-hangings, embroideries, jewellery, printed cottons, woven and knotted carpets, silk damasks and tapestries. After the first three years a severe illness obliged Morris to choose between giving up his house in Kent and giving up his work in London. With great reluctance he chose the former, and in 1865 he established himself, to

be thenceforth a Londoner for life, in Queen Square, Bloomsbury, under the same roof with his workshops.

During these years poetry had been almost laid aside in the pressure of other occupations. But almost as soon as Morris returned to London he resumed it, in a new manner of extraordinary richness and beauty. The general scheme of The Earthly Paradise had been already framed by him: and he now began the composition of a series of narrative poems for that work, which went on continuously for four years. One of the earliest written, the story of the Golden Fleece, outgrew its limits so much as to become an epic of over ten thousand lines. Its publication in 1867, under the title of The Life and Death of Jason, gave Morris wide fame and a secure position among the English poets. The three volumes of The Earthly Paradise, successively published in the three following years, contain twenty-five more narrative poems, connected with one another by a framework of intricate skill and singular fitness and beauty. The poems actually published by Morris in those four years—and there were many others which were either destroyed by him or still remain in manuscript—extend to over fifty thousand lines. His friends invented a story of

a blue closet in his house completely filled with manuscript poetry from floor to ceiling.

This torrent of production did not make him slacken in his work as a decorator and manufacturer. To that work, on the contrary, he now began to add another: the production of illuminated manuscripts on paper and vellum, executed in many different styles, but all of unapproached beauty among modern work. About the same time he had begun the study of Icelandic and the translation of the Sagas into English. The portrait of Morris by Mr. Watts, which now hangs in the National Portrait Gallery, shows him in this culminating year of his earlier life, in the prime of his vigour and at the height of his powers.

Here the first act of Morris's life ends. It was a period of brilliant and romantic achievement. A pause of about four years followed it, the slack water between two great tides. What he had accomplished as an artist and a poet left him still unsatisfied. There may be traced in all his work during these four years a restlessness due to the constant search after fresh methods of artistic expression, and behind that, the growing feeling that inasmuch as true art is co-extensive with life, the true practice of art involves, at every point & at every moment, questions be-

longing to the province of moral, social, & political doctrine. In the first of the four years fall two events slight in themselves, but both of the utmost importance in his life. One of them was his first journey through Iceland, the effect of which upon his mind may be traced in nearly all his later writings. The other was the discovery and acquisition of Kelmscott Manor House, a small but very beautiful building of the earlier seventeenth century on the banks of the upper Thames. His dwelling-place remained in London, but Kelmscott became his real home and more than his home: it was his haven of peace, his chief worldly treasure, the centre and symbol of that "love of the earth and worship of it" which was his deepest instinct. But if it brought peace to him, that was not yet. He was hard at work, but working in a tangle. He tried his hand as a novelist. He made some curious and imperfectly successful attempts at reviving two forms of poetry long obsolete, the drama of the later Middle Ages, and the native English versification which had been swept away by Chaucer. He kept his hands in constant occupation as a scribe and illuminator. For a time he even resumed practice as a painter. The occasion which ended this period of fluctuation and indecision was a crisis that occurred in his

business as a professional man and that led, in the winter of 1874, to the dissolution of the firm and the re-constitution of the business under Morris's sole management. From that winter the second part of his life began. He had already come to live in this neighbourhood, though not yet in this house; and the forces were now at work in him that changed him from the artist of Bloomsbury to the Socialist of Hammersmith. The new period which now opened had lost indeed the irrecoverable romance of youth, but was as copious in achievement upon a much wider field.

The first products of this second period, as of the first, were in literature. He had been for some time engaged in the production of an illuminated manuscript of Virgil's Aeneid, and in the course of the work had begun to translate the poem into English verse. The manuscript was finally laid aside for the translation, which was finished and published in 1875. It had been preceded earlier in the year by a volume of translations from the Icelandic, and was followed almost at once by the composition of his longest poem, the epic of Sigurd the Volsung: which was, in Morris's own opinion, his highest if not his best work in poetry; & is memorable in literature as the poem which comes

nearest to the spirit and manner of Homer of all European poems since the Iliad & Odyssey.

But Morris's hands were never content to be doing nothing but hold a pen. While Sigurd was in progress he had taken up the practical art of dyeing in connection with his manufacturing business. He spent months at Staffordshire and Nottingham dye-works, mastering all their processes, and experimenting in the revival of old or discovery of new methods. Two years spent among dye-vats were followed by two more during which he was absorbed in work among looms, and in the revival of carpet-weaving as a fine art. But amid these labours he found himself insensibly taking more and more part in public affairs. From 1876 onwards he was one of the most active members of the Eastern Question Association, which did so much by its influence on public opinion to save the country from a disgraceful and disastrous war in defence of the Turkish Empire. In 1877 he founded the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. In 1879 he became treasurer of the National Liberal League. The giving of lectures & addresses had become one of his regular occupations. They were at first chiefly delivered to working designers and art-students, but from the first involved his whole theory of life & practice. From a man

of letters and artist, living intensely within a small circle, he rapidly developed, almost against his will, into a teacher, a leader, a man of public affairs.

So the process went on, until in 1882 a combination of convergent causes profoundly altered his attitude towards current politics and social questions. At first an enthusiastic Liberal of the Radical wing, he found his enthusiasm wane, cease, and turn into open disgust, partly on account of the Irish coercive legislation of the Liberal Government of 1881, partly on account of the timidity or aversion with which that Government regarded social reform. At that period he surveyed the whole situation anew. Looking back, in his forty-ninth year, over his own record of success or failure, and looking forward to the future in the light of the past, he found himself forced to the conclusion that hitherto he had not gone to the root of the matter: that, art being a function of life, sound art was impossible except where life was organised under sound conditions: that the tendency of what is called civilisation, ever since the great industrial revolution, and more and more obviously in its continued progress, had been to dehumanise life: and that the only hope for the future was, if that were yet possible, to recon-

stitute society on a new basis. Many other practical men, many other students and artists have believed this. Morris proceeded to act on the belief.

A small association of advanced London Radicals, chiefly belonging to the working class, who were advocates of a legislative programme of social reforms with implied tendencies towards State-socialism, had just been formed under the name of the Democratic Federation. It was the only organisation existing and at hand which seemed to Morris, from his new point of view, to be at work in the right direction. What its programme substantially amounted to then was the securing of better conditions of life for the working class. Morris joined it in January 1883, in the belief that this object was a necessary first step towards further progress, & was one which could be attained by properly organised action on the part of the working class itself. Within the year, the doctrine of the Federation had developed into professed Socialism, and Morris himself had become one of the leaders of the Socialist party.

Into the history of the movement during the following years I do not propose to enter at present. To some here it is too familiar, from others here perhaps too remote, to yield itself to any

rapid summary. Parts of the story would be highly contentious. Parts are trivial & ignoble. Morris's own faith never wavered; but as the years passed, his hope became very forlorn. The first great shock was the disruption of the Federation owing to jealousies among its leaders, and differences of opinion with regard to policy. The Socialist League, organised from the seceders, passed through similar vicissitudes. To its service Morris had given himself up with even more complete devotion. Forced by circumstances into a leadership of a struggling group, most of whom were poor, many ignorant, and some disloyal, he accepted the position with perfect simplicity; and, conspicuous as he was among the rest alike by means, education, and character, he was to all of them a comrade and an equal.

It was not, I think, until 1887 that Morris became convinced that no social revolution was immediately practicable. It was, at all events, the experiences of the 13th of November in that year, the famous Bloody Sunday, which finally confirmed him in that view. He had already begun to relax the extreme tension at which he had been living in the previous years. The translation of the Odyssey into English verse, taken up by him for the recreation of spare half-hours

or tedious railway journeys, on his missions among the great manufacturing centres, was already completed. His imagination began to take a freer play. Without abatement in his Socialist beliefs, he resumed other and older interests. It was at this juncture that he expressed himself most fully, in what is the most perfect of his prose writings. The Dream of John Ball, at once a romance, a political manifesto, and a study in the philosophy of history, exactly marks the point at which the old enthusiasm and the new wisdom mingled in complete equipoise and harmony. At the same time he formulated the true work of his party in words which have not been bettered by later experience: EDUCATION TOWARDS REVOLUTION BY INFLUENCE ON OPINION. All education not directed towards revolution fell short of the mark. All work towards revolution otherwise than through education fell wide of it. Such was the doctrine to which he had now come, and by which he remained.

Once Morris had satisfied himself that an ideal life was not attainable through any sudden revolution for the present world, he could let his imagination loose on the life of a remote or fabulous past, or project it into the life of a still more remote and far more fabulous future. In

the latter direction, one in which all human experience hitherto goes to show that failure, and generally grotesque failure, is certain, he made only a single essay. News from Nowhere, a romantic pastoral describing the England of some remote future under realised Socialism, is the most singular of all Morris's writings in its inception, its production, and its fortunes. It was sketched out as a protest or counter-blast against a crude American Utopia, called Looking Backward, which had been enjoying a brief season of immense popularity—a sort of nightmare of State-socialism in which, if one could conceive it as existing at all, life would have been intolerable to any human being after the first twenty minutes. It was contributed by Morris to the Commonweal after he had been ejected from its management by the Anarchist group in whose hands the Commonweal, and the Socialist League itself, soon afterwards came to an ignominious end. Yet, slight and fantastic as it is, it has been translated into three European languages, and has probably spread the knowledge of Morris as a Socialist more widely than all his other writings.

The other direction, that of an imaginary past, in which he found scope for his imagination and relief from the pressure of the actual world, is

represented by the long series of prose romances which he went on writing for the rest of his life. The first of these, The House of the Wolfings, is a story in which the romantic and supernatural elements are placed in a semi-historical setting, the scene of the action being a Teutonic community of Central Europe in the time of the later Roman Empire. It was followed by The Roots of the Mountains, a story of somewhat similar method, but of no definite place or time. In the next, The Story of the Glittering Plain, he passed into a purely fabulous region, in which the remainder of the series continue to move. The last of these, The Story of the Sundering Flood, was only finished by him a few weeks before his death.

Since 1887, when Morris's patient efforts at keeping it together began to slacken before accumulated discouragements, the Socialist League had been dwindling in numbers and losing coherence. It passed into the control of the Anarchist section in 1889, and Morris formally withdrew from it in the following year. It was then that, with the help of a few friends or neighbours, he founded, on a very humble and unpretending scale, the Hammersmith Socialist Society, which does me the honour to listen to this address, and which may still, as I hope,

have a life before it not without use and honour and the sustaining sense of comradeship.

Without any modification in his creed, Morris now dropped insensibly into the position of what may be called a passive Socialist. The last and most absorbing interest of his later years, the famous Kelmscott Press, was then in course of being started. He had determined to revive the art of printing as it had flourished for the first half century after its invention. He succeeded in producing work of an excellence and beauty which since that age had been unknown, and which had and still has an immense effect upon the practice of the art throughout the world. It was the art in which perhaps he came nearest to effecting a practical revolution. The caprice of fashion, so often against him, turned now for once on his side. Even the old cases in which he kept his type seem to have retained a sort of sacramental virtue in other hands: & the market is crowded with imitations of Kelmscott printing which at least serve to set off the excellence of the original.

But the limit set by the frailty of human life had now been nearly reached. The Kelmscott Press was the last form taken by a productive energy more rich and various than any other which modern times have seen. So manifold in-

deed was Morris's activity that it puzzled an age accustomed to specialising, and perplexed his friends as well as his critics. But in fact all these varying energies were directed towards a single object, the reintegration of human life: and he practised so many arts because to him art was a single thing. Just so his work, while completely original and completely modern, bears an aspect of mediaevalism, because it was all produced in relation to a single doctrine, namely this: that civilisation ever since the break-up of the Middle Ages had been, on the whole, on a wrong course, and that in the specific arts as well as in the general conduct of life, it was necessary to go back to the Middle Ages, with the view not of remaining there, but of starting afresh from that point to trace out the path that had been missed. So long as any human industry existed which had once been an art (that is to say, a proper and rational occupation for human beings) in the full sense, and had now become merely mechanical or commercial, so long would Morris have instinctively passed from one to another, tracing back each to its source, and attempting to reconstitute each as a real art so far as the conditions of the modern world permitted. What led him towards Socialism was the full conviction, drawn from both reasoning

and experience, that those existing conditions were stronger than any individual genius, and that for a new birth of art there was needed a new kind of life. For a little while, in the first flush and ardour of the Socialist crusade, that new kind of life seemed actually within reach. Morris suspended his own art to become a revolutionary, because it was a case of giving up the parts in order to gain the whole. When experience convinced him that the whole was, for this generation at least, unattainable, he resumed his work on specific arts, because, to use his own words, he could not help it, & would be miserable if he were not doing it. Nor were those last years the least happy of a full and rich life. They were not many. In 1895 his health began to give way. The completion of the magnificent Kelmscott Chaucer, the love & labour of years, in June 1896, came as a signal for his own going. He died that autumn, on the 3rd of October, in this house.

THE TIMES ARE strange and evil. Round us and within us we may see without much searching all the signs that hitherto have preceded great revolutions in human history. It is just four years since Morris died; but since then a great change has come, not only over that

small & struggling Socialist party which drew from him so much of its consistency & vitality, but over the larger currents of public and national life. The end of the century, now close upon us, might well seem to any highly kindled imagination the visible index of some approaching end of the world. To those who hope for and work towards human progress, whether or not they call themselves by the name of Socialists, the outward aspect of the time is full of profound discouragement. Nor is the discouragement confined to them. It was said to me lately, by one whose memory goes back with clearness over fifty years, that one great difference between that time and this is the general loss of high spirits, of laughter and the enjoyment of life. If that be so, it is not without reasons. We may see all round us how vainly people try to drown in increasing luxury and excitement the sense that joy and beauty are dwindling out of life; with what pitiful eagerness they dress themselves up in pretended enthusiasms, which seem to bring little joy to the maker or the user. The uneasy feeling is abroad that the nineteenth century, which has done such wonderful things, and from which things so much more wonderful were hoped, has been on the whole a failure. Fifty years ago men's minds were full of ideals.

Some of them seem to have come to nothing. Others have received a strangely disenchanting fulfilment. Cinder heaps smoulder where there once were beacon fires. Everywhere reaction is triumphant. The chosen leaders of the people proclaim, not in England alone, that there is no more room left in public affairs for magnanimity. The strongest intellects range themselves on the side of force and riches. Religion has come to terms with the princes of this world. It was made a reproach, not without reason, against the revolutionarism of a century ago, that it went abroad with the cry, "Be my brother, or I will kill you." The modern spirit has substituted a more terrible gospel. What capitalism says now, to a people all too ready to accept the command, is, " Be my slave, and you shall kill your brother." With a wider understanding of what a capitalist society involves, there seems to have come a dulling of men's consciences. Recent events have shown that even its more vivid and drastic methods of fire and sword are losing power to shock the careless cruelty of those who are at once its agents and its victims. Even the movement to which Morris devoted the best part of his life has dwindled and darkened: it has lost its high hopes, and seems tending, in France and Germany as well as in England, to

the mere gas & water Socialism which does not lie beyond the scope of an enlightened capitalism, & can point with confidence to dividends as the test of its doctrines. We should not try to evade these facts. It is well to keep in mind, in times of depression no less than in times of elation, in disappointment as in hope, the words of a great English thinker nearly two hundred years ago: "Things are what they are, and their consequences will be what they will be: why, then, should we seek to be deceived?"

The Socialist movement of the eighties has become part of history; we can begin to see now, in the light where history sets it, what it meant to do, and what it did. I do not say, where it failed. For nothing in this world, properly speaking, fails. Causes have their effects, neither more nor less. So-called failure means that the causes, or the effects, or both, have been misunderstood. In Morris's own profound & fruitful words, "Men fight to lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out to be not what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name."

These words in The Dream of John Ball may be familiar to some of you. To no one who

has once grasped their meaning can they ever lose their weight and their power of guidance. They open too large a field to be dealt with in the few minutes for which I still ask your indulgence, for they cover, not a single man's work nor a single age's movement only, but the whole of human history. Restricting ourselves to that one effort to which, from the year 1883 onward, five or six years of Morris's life were almost wholly devoted; what was it, we may ask, that Socialists in England then meant to do, and how did they propose to do it?

They aimed at a great result, the total reconstitution of society. In the first flush of the movement nothing seemed impossible; & Morris, with all his practical sagacity & experience, shared the confidence of his colleagues. The Social Revolution seemed then a thing that a few years might compass, & that at all events men then living might reasonably hope to see. It was this they meant to effect. Some thought it could be brought about by raising the working classes in direct revolt against capitalism. Others thought it could be brought about by an adroit use of existing forces, one balanced against another as the sails and rudder of a ship are set to make it move on a certain course. Others again thought it could be brought about by a

great wave of feeling, and the growth of contagious enthusiasm among large masses of people. What none of them at first saw clearly was that they proposed to produce effects from insufficient causes. Vain-Hope the ferryman may take his passengers across the river; but he cannot pass them in through the gate.

This was perhaps most obvious in the Opportunist or Parliamentarian section of the party. These set out to avail themselves skilfully of the weak points in the existing system of government: to introduce a Socialist party as a small organised band which—if I may say so without any meaning of offence or dishonour—might sell itself alternately to the highest bidder among the great capitalist parties, and finally capture the citadel of government itself by a rush. They forgot that, even if they succeeded in doing so against almost infinite chances, and even if, against odds still more deadly, they kept their own principles clear and their own ideals unstained amid the tortuous paths of policy, they would be no better off, towards the attainment of a truly socialised commonwealth, than they had been before. Until the world is Socialist, there can be no reign of Socialism. And however much fictitious strength may for the moment disguise essential weakness, it will

crumple up directly that a real strain is put upon it.

But, in their degree, the other sections of the party made the same mistake. Morris himself, though from the first he saw and stood out against the snares of opportunism, was greatly disposed for a time to believe in miracles: nor did he keep clear of the fault—honourable enough and pardonable enough in any leader of a forlorn hope, yet doubtful in its ultimate value—of assuming, before those whom he led and those whom he urged to join him, a greater confidence than he really felt. The single direction in which really effective work lay did not come to him at once, but it came to him soon. It had not come to him when he joined the Democratic Federation; for then he, like most of his colleagues, was only working towards Socialism, was merely a Socialist in the making. By the time of the foundation of the Socialist League it had come to him—so his private letters clearly show—as a personal conviction. Before he quitted the League & formed this Society he had proclaimed it publicly and decisively; it is the burden of his later articles in The Commonweal, and the substance of what he kept urging on his colleagues in public and in private. As a poet he might have enchant-

ing visions of realised Socialism in a vague future. As a leader he might kindle his followers by hopes of work to be effected in a future quite close at hand. As what is called a practical man —a phrase too often used to mean a man who omits to bring his actions to the test of principles—he could not but see that definite improvements of detail might be effected in civic life by Parliament and by a Socialist group of members of Parliament. But as a Socialist pure and simple (the two epithets in the full weight of their meaning apply to Morris with consummate fitness) he knew that the work before him and those who stood by him was a single and definite thing only, and that was, to make Socialists.

TO MAKE SOCIALISTS: not to prescribe work for them when made, not even to anticipate much what their work would be, still less to suppose that their work would do itself, that its results could be forced on society by terror, or wheedled out of society by dexterous intrigue, or stolen from society while it was asleep: that was the one path of duty, of honour, & even, in a sense, of peace. All those other aims were foredoomed to failure (a failure that might be glorious or might be tragic or might be merely ludicrous) because the end they proposed to attain

was wholly out of relation to the means they applied towards it. With as much reason might the earliest Christians have proposed to capture & revolutionise the Roman Empire. What they set themselves to do was just this, to make Christians. In three hundred years of that silent process Christianity itself became hardened, adulterated, partly sterilised. The early Church passed through all the phases with which modern Socialists are so familiar: wild unreasoning hope, predictions falsified by the event, treachery of comrades, fallings off to right hand & to left, bitter quarrels over matters of no importance, a growth of fanatical dogma in which the central truths of their faith all but disappeared. But all the while the central instinct of making Christians lived on: & when Christians enough, such as they were, had been made, the Roman Empire—& by the Roman Empire I mean no mere machinery of government, but the whole fabric of European civilisation—dropped into their hands like a ripe pear.

To make Socialists then, so one finds Morris more and more clearly seeing, more & more urgently insisting as time went on, was the one thing needful. Failure in doing anything else than this was, properly speaking, not failure at all: for the mistake was to be doing anything

else; and so far as they were marching on the wrong road, whether it were the Federation or the League, whether they called themselves Communists or Anarchists or Parliamentarians, failure to arrive at the journey's end was immaterial, just as success, supposing it arrived at, was illusory. Such success and such failure were alike severe tests that the faithful had to undergo. It was the test of failure that was the commonest one, and probably therefore the one most needed. Many broke down under it. But Morris at all events remained firm in the belief that, in a phrase which must have clung deep in his mind, for he quotes it again and again in his private letters, "he that shall endure shall be saved."

The passage in which that phrase occurs is a remarkable one. I will ask you to let me quote it in full, not merely as words placed, some forty years after his death, in the mouth of Jesus Christ, & believed then to represent substantially what he had himself said when he saw his death near, but as words of permanent truth and having a most direct bearing on the circumstances of the present day.

"Take heed that no man deceive you: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many.

"You shall hear of wars & rumours of wars: see that you be not troubled; for all these things must come, but the end is not yet.

"Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there shall be famines and pestilences: all these things are but the beginnings of the birth-pangs.

"They shall imprison and kill you: you shall be hated among all nations for my sake; and then shall many take offence, & betray one another, & hate one another. False prophets shall arise: wrong shall be filled up to the brim: the love of many shall grow cold. But he that shall endure shall be saved."

And is this all? some may ask who set out with no less purpose than that of changing the world. How can we be content to be saved ourselves, what is that worth as the price of endurance, if the world remains obstinate in neither accepting nor desiring salvation? if even such success as may be gained only throws back the enemy on more impregnable intrenchments & summons up more overwhelming reserves of the hostile forces? For some it may be sufficient to say that no question of ultimate success can alter the plain path of duty. "Give her the wages of going on and not to die." But to ordinary human nature that is but a grim answer. The

future is unknown to us. No discoveries of science & no analysis of history can throw any light on what will happen ten, or twenty, or five hundred years hence. For that we have still to go to the poets or the prophets. Morris never lost the cheery courage that was willing to start over and over again, even with twelve disciples, as he said, or with half a dozen. Other men would have to fight for what he meant under another name: the Socialism of the nineteenth century might, as he said, have run into sand, but its foundations were on the rock, and on them, some day and by some men, the house of life would be built. Make Socialists, and let time work, for the day will come at last. In the passage of prophecy I quoted from the Gospels I stopped just now at the point up to which its truth can be verified by events, but the prophecy itself does not stop there. There is one more sentence. "He that shall endure shall be saved: and this gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations: AND THEN SHALL THE END COME."

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